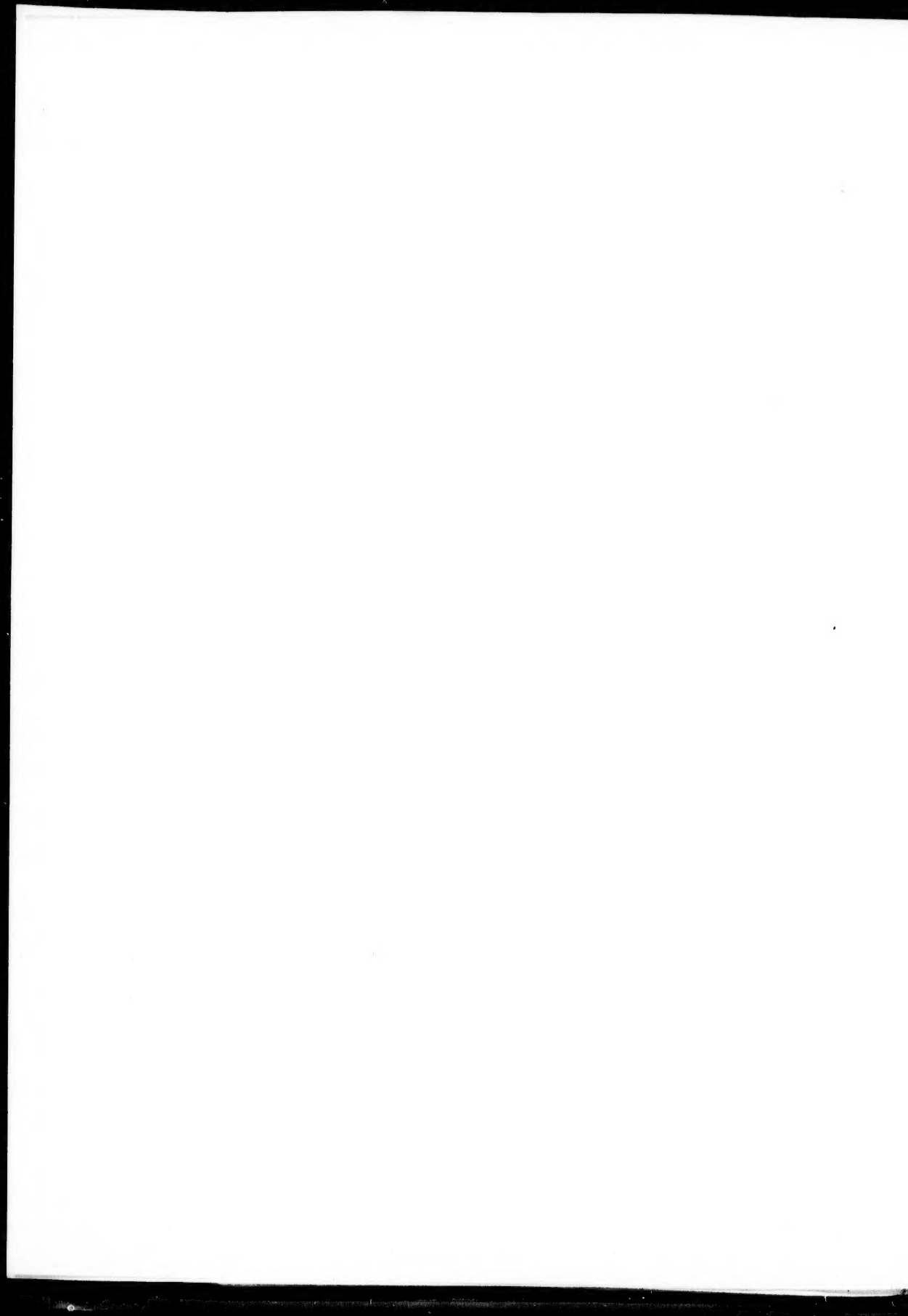




DUTY TO THE CHURCH.

AN ADDRESS

TO THOSE PERSONS RESIDING IN BROOKLYN AND ITS VICINITY, WHO HAVE HERETOFORE
BELONGED TO THE CHURCH IN ANY PART OF THE BRITISH DOMINIONS.

BY

EVAN M. JOHNSON,

RECTOR OF ST. MICHAEL'S CHURCH,

BROOKLYN, L. I.

BROOKLYN:
I. VAN ANDEN'S STEAM PRESSES, 30 FULTON STREET.
1855.

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DUTY TO THE CHURCH.

THIS city having been and at present being the residence of many of you for whom this address is intended; and having for the last thirty years discharged (however imperfectly) the duties of Rector of St. John's and St. Michael's Churches; I have had a great opportunity to observe the varied effect which a change of country and residence produces upon the religious character and habits. Called upon as I am, and have been most frequently, to visit the sick and afflicted, and to perform the last rites of the Church, I can but become familiar with the state of religion as it exists among every class of people. In very many cases it has been my happiness to become acquainted with both families and individuals, now resident here, who have uniformly and constantly attended upon "the word and ministry" of the Church; who have continued in the same regular habits of worship which they practised "at home," and who have

thus remained in "the Apostles' fellowship and doctrine," and have "grown in grace, and increased in knowledge and in virtue."

It grieves me, however, to say, and I trust I shall not be considered less your friend for saying so, that I am compelled to believe a change of country has, on the whole, an injurious effect upon the religious character and frequently the moral habits. How frequently has it been said to me by the sick or dying penitent, "Oh! how have I neglected my God and Saviour! how have I neglected the Church and her ordinances! When "at home," I never was absent from Church; since I have been here, I have never attended at all." This is not the language of a solitary individual; it is language that is repeated time and again. When I have been called to perform the occasional offices of the Church, such as funerals, or marriages, or baptism of children, I have found persons who it was evident had been educated in the Church and accustomed to its services, by the manner in which they joined in its responsive parts. Of such, I have frequently made the inquiry where they attended Church? In a vast many instances, I have been answered, "*Since I have been in this country, I have never attended church at all—'at home,' I never was absent.*"

I think, my friends, that those of you who have not neglected your duty in the particular above

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referred to in this address, must have been convinced from your own observation, that it is true of great numbers, and especially, of younger persons, and those who are employed among the commercial and laborious classes, there is great inattention to the Church and means of grace. I know you will not impute to me any other motives in making this declaration, than the desire to promote your own temporal and eternal good, if in this address I attempt to lay before you, as the result of my own reflections and observation, some of the *causes* to which this declension may be imputed, and to suggest some *remedies*, which, if adopted, would go far to obviate this acknowledged evil.

There can be no doubt but the breaking up of family, and domestic and social relations, almost universally effected by a change of country, is attended with injurious effects. You have left your family circle, your father's house, your mother's care, your brethren and kindred with whom you took sweet counsel, your parish Church, your pastor, who perhaps admitted you by baptism into the fold of Christ, and by whom you have been taught the rudiments of religion. You are comparatively among strangers—those restraints which at home kept you from irregularity, if not vice, are no longer binding. Some of you may have fallen into the society of the dishonest, the prodigal, the abandoned; if not, you perhaps found your first acquaintances

much like yourselves, loosed from the restraints of their family and parochial circle. It would be marvellous, if under all such untoward circumstances, you had retained all your regular habits and devout practices.

I think it is for want of information and proper consideration, that many fall off from their religious character. "At home," most of you belonged to the Church established in the British Empire. Observe, I do not say to the Established Church *of*, but *in* the British Empire. I do not wish to call you to remember the Church which you left, especially in England and Ireland, as connected with the State, and as identified, perhaps to the personal knowledge of many of you, with many vexatious and troublesome questions and disputes arising out of that connexion; but the Church as it was first established in Great Britain by the labors of St. Paul, or of the Bishops in the Apostolical age, which was afterwards re-established and incorporated with the former, especially in England, by St. Austin, and which, at a later period, in the full exercise of its legitimate powers, arose in its might and rejected the many additions of man's device which had been made both to her doctrines and worship by the usurped authority of the Bishops of Rome. It is to the Church established *in this sense*, the Church to which your fathers from time imme-

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morial have belonged—the old Church—older than either the Roman or the modern sects—the Church in which your parents with pious care caused you to be admitted at your baptism, in whose sublime strains they now, with your relatives and friends, offer up their daily and weekly sacrifice of praise and worship. It is to the claims of this your parent Church, upon you as her children, that I ask your attention.

The history of the earlier measures adopted by the Church in England to plant a branch of her own vine in these then colonies in America, is exceedingly interesting; but it is principally to the fact that the Bishops of the Church of England, after the separation of these states from the mother country, consecrated Bishops and committed to their charge the congregations and individual Christians, who had before been spiritually subjected to them, that I wish to call your attention.* This was done with all due regularity, and by this means the Bishops and Clergy of the Church in America are the successors of the Bishops in Great Britain, and all are in a direct line of succession from St. Austin, if not, as is possible, from the Bishops of England in the first century. The fact that the

* A most invaluable History of the Protestant Episcopal Church in America, was published by Bishop Wilberforce of Oxford, England, a few years ago, and was re-published by Sword & Stanford, New York, where it may be had. It ought to be in the hands of every individual who desires to obtain a knowledge of the connexion of the Church in America with that in England, and is indispensable to every Sunday School Library.

spiritual charge over the Church in the United States was thus transferred, shows that as to spiritual matters they are but one Church. The same submission, therefore, is due to the spiritual authority of the Chief Pastors from individuals belonging to either Church, resident in the country of the other, whether they be natives of Great Britain residing in the United States, or whether of the United States residing in Great Britain. At about the same time that this regular Apostolical succession was obtained, the Liturgy of the Church was adopted to the form of government established here, and some other alterations were made, not affecting the mode or order of public worship. The Thirty-nine Articles, and the Book of Homilies, were received as containing Scriptural doctrines and prescribing Christian duties.

Thus the Church in this country is one with the Church to which you belonged before you came here as to discipline, doctrine and practice. She has the same claim to your regard, to your obedience and to your submission, that the Church in England had. To separate from this one Church was schism there, is schism here. In the days of the Apostles it was said to members of the Church, "Let there be no schism in the body of Christ," and they were to "mark them that caused divisions, (schisms.)" It is, however, now scarcely ever really considered that schism is a sin, and that it is forbidden by the

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word of God. Almost every one thinks he has a right to withdraw from the Church and join any class of schismatics he may choose. But, my friends, it is schismatical, and therefore sinful to do so. I am persuaded that of those who forsake the communion of the Church, the greater part do so more from want of information and consideration, than from any design to despise this Apostolical precept.*

It is for want of information, or at least consideration of these facts, that many of you think that here one Church is called a *sect*, in the same sense as another, because no one is established by law. On your first arrival here, you did not ask for the Church—the Church of your fathers; you delayed to do your duty and transfer your spiritual allegiance. Thus an inroad was made upon your religious habits, and in too many instances you have never returned to them. What wonder, then, that those who have neglected the ordinances of the Church; “despised the holy Sabbaths,” and in some instances have even disused the reception of

*SCHISM.—John Wesley advises the members of the Church to “beware of schism, of making a rent in the Church of Christ,” what he means by the Church of Christ, plainly appears from a letter of his (vol. X, page 232). “I would take some pains to recover any one from error or to reconcile him to *our* Church. I mean to the Church of England; from which I do not separate, and I (probably) never shall. The little Church, which I occasionally mentioned at Holy Mount, is that wherein *I read prayers*, I preach, I administer *the sacrament every Sunday* when I am in London.” “To separate ourselves from a body of living Christians with whom we were before united, is a *grievous breach of the law of love*,” Vol. III, page 384.

the Holy Sacrifice of the altar, upon which they once feasted; what wonder if such as these (and alas! they are too many,) are in a state of spiritual death—"dead while they live." What wonder, that when temporal death stares them in the face, and they know they are about to go into the presence of an offended God, that the recollection of their neglect of Him and their duty, should add a bitter pang to the accusations of a guilty conscience! Such is the fact. It is, my friends, to save you, into whose hands this address may fall, and who know that your case has been here described, from the stings of such a conscience at such an hour, as well as from the eternal displeasure of offended Majesty, that I entreat you now, to "think of these things."

I know that in many instances, direct means are used to effect your estrangement from the Church. I will mention a few of them:—Your prejudices against some of the abuses which have grown up in England (and which many there lament,) in consequence of the connexion of Church and State, are appealed to. You are asked, will you here continue to be attached to a Church, which "at home" compels every one to contribute to its support; which upholds so many lordly Bishops, and rich and indolent clergy? This kind of talk is most common; and by such appeals to prejudice, the attempt is often successfully made to induce our weaker

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brethren to stray from the rightful fold. But what have these abuses which have crept into the Established Church *of* England, to do with her as a member of Christ's body. These abuses do not change the character of the truths which she teaches, or the validity of the sacraments which her ministers dispense. They do not exist in the Church *here*, if they do *there*. If you have experienced any evils on account of the connexion of the Church and State, you ought to be thankful that *here* they cannot again occur.

You are told that you cannot go to church here unless you hire a pew, and that you and your families would not be accommodated if you were to make the attempt. I am aware that a difference of practice in regard to the manner of supporting the Clergy prevails here, from that which exists "at home." There, the Clergy and Church being supported by Government, it is, or ought to be so, that every one has a seat in Church. But that seat is not without charge, only it is paid for by tax, collected by the officers of state. Here you are entirely exempt from this as a tax; you pay for the support for the Gospel Ministry, either what you voluntarily agree to do, or what you are charged as a rent for your seat. Though from necessity, the support for the Minister is thus ordinarily obtained, there are few churches in which sittings cannot be gratuitously obtained by application at the door. I do not believe an instance can be pointed out, where

a person or a family has been compelled to leave the communion, and absent themselves from the services of the Church, for want of seats, if they have made any exertion to obtain one; but I do know that many have done so because they *were told* that the effort would be fruitless.*

Another very common and very effectual method used to draw you away from your Church, will be found in the unceasing efforts of sectarian *Sabbath* School visitors, to induce you to place your children under their charge. They tell you that the *Sabbath* School cause is a good one—that the children are only taught what is good—there is no sectarianism—it is perhaps a “Union School;” you are pleased with this show of kindness and attention, and you consent, without thinking of the consequences, to send your children. In this school they are introduced to a method of worship new to them—they hear many crude and heretical doctrines—they are taken to the meeting house or chapel, and soon forget the Church at whose altar you yourself dedicated them to the Lord, and where you promised that they should be instructed in the catechism, and order and doctrines of the Church, and “brought to the Bishop to be confirmed by him.” By and by, you accompany your children on the Lord’s day,

* In St. Michael’s Church, of which the author is Rector, there are no pews and the seats are free. The church is supported by the weekly and quarterly collections and by the voluntary contributions of the attendants.

and after a little time you find yourself, without ever intending to be so, indeed dissenters from your Church, and violating your most express and covenant engagements. I am sure this is the case of many families, resident at present in this city.*

Others of you have been drawn away from the Church, by the enticements held out to go and hear some roving, popular, sectarian, revival preacher. It is said it can do no harm to go and hear. If you refuse, you are said to be bigoted. You have acquiesced. Perhaps you have become temporarily excited—carried away for the time by some new doctrine or new device, and in an unguarded moment have handed in your name as a candidate for admission into this sectarian society. Some of you may have done this without thinking how you have, by so doing, trampled under foot the Church of Christ, and cut yourselves off from that holy fellowship into which, at your baptism you were introduced. By heeding such like schemes and advice many of you have been drawn away from the Church, and for a while have been induced to “walk with dissent.” After a while the novelty of this wears away; you have forgotten your Mother; your early habits have been broken up, you have adopted nothing substantial, and fall away into the

* I have been told that in order to deter persons ignorant of our customs from bringing their children to Holy Baptism, as they were wont to do “at home,” they have been told, that the fee for Baptism was exorbitantly high. I have never known a charge of any kind made or demanded by any clergyman of the Church in this country.

hands of the destroyer. "I speak what I do know, and testify what I have seen."—(John iii. 2.) These are some of the causes of the spiritual and religious declension which we so much lament to see prevalent.

Will you permit me to offer a few considerations, with a kind regard for your own eternal interests, as to the remedy of these acknowledged evils. Let every one of you, whether you be single or the head of a family, if you have heretofore, since you have been in this country, neglected the duties of religion, at once inquire for the "old Church;" inquire for some clergyman to whom is committed the cure of souls; make known to him your whole case, whether it be that of a backslider or a despiser of the Church; ask the privilege to become one of his flock and leave your name with him. Let it be your business at once, to commence attendance on the Public Prayers and service of the Church. Go to your regular Church, and, with your family, (if you have one,) be known to your clergyman and to society, as a consistent churchman. If you have children, take them to a Sunday School, where the catechism of the Church, and the forms of the Church, and the doctrines of the Church, are taught, and where no strange practices are in use, or *new* doctrines taught, and thus redeem your "vows unto the Lord." In this way, you will continue your connexion with a legitimate ministry, of Apostolical succession; you will go where the true Christian

sacrifice is offered, and the sacraments duly and lawfully administered. Permit not yourselves to be drawn aside by the persuasions of those who would strive to make you believe that "one church is as good as another;" of those who cry "Lo! he is here, and lo! he is there; go not after them." Wait you upon God in his holy Church, to which he hath promised his blessing, and in the use of whose sacred rites and holy sacraments, you will assuredly find given to you his strengthening spirit. The holy spirit is the animating principle of the Church, the body of Christ. Whatever others may desire to be, or whatever they may represent themselves to be, they do not belong to that Church from which they have separated, and to which belong the promises. How can you expect the blessed influences of the Holy Spirit to be shed abroad in your hearts, when you repudiate the Church of Christ in which you have been baptised, or confirmed or received the blessed sacrament of the body and blood of Christ, as the case may be, because some poor deluded schismatic has told you he has found out a better way, and you have been weak enough to be lead from your steadfastness. I entreat you, most affectionately, my friends, who have been drawn away from your Church either by the enticements of the world, the flesh, or the devil, to stop and think of the account you must give in the great day, for "doing despite to the spirit of grace," or living without God in the world. The day most assuredly will come when you must account to God for all the

“deeds done in the body,” for all your violations of the positive commands of Christ and for your rejection of those great privileges which were vouchsafed to you at your baptism, and which you forfeit when you leave the communion of the Church, through whose ministry they were pledged and conveyed to you. My friends, you have an especial duty to perform to those who come here from time to time from your mother country; take them by the hand, lead them to the Church of their fathers, caution them against neglect of religious duty, to beware of “seducing spirits,” and let such see, by your example and practice, that you are in “the old paths.” Look especially after youth and engage them at once in the service of God, before habits of spiritual indolence are formed. Remember that Christ established his Church, and has continued it in the world, for the “perfecting of the saints,” and that by the means offered you, through the Holy Ghost shed abroad in it, you may secure the eternal salvation of your souls; out of it, you have no promise of aid. We pray you, then, as God hath appointed, *in His Church*, seek for the graces of penitence and obedience, and strive to discharge every “work of faith and labor of love,” and you shall find rest to your souls.

EVAN M. JOHNSON.

Rector of St. Michael's Church, Brooklyn.

Easter Monday, A. D., 1855.

